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Chair: Mr. Saikal ..... (Afghanistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 74: Promotion and protection of human rights (*continued*)

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments (*continued*) (A/73/309, A/73/281, A/73/282, A/73/207, A/73/48, A/73/40, A/73/44, A/73/264, A/73/140, A/73/55 and A/73/56)

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(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (*continued*) (A/73/308, A/73/299 and A/73/330)

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (*continued*) (A/73/36)

1. **Mr. Akram** (Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development), introducing the report of the Working Group on its nineteenth session (A/HRC/39/56), said that the Working Group had held its first interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to development and another with experts on the implementation and realization of that right in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The issues addressed included financial flows; developments in jurisprudence before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights; challenges to implementation of the right to development and the Sustainable Development Goals; the right to development and inequalities; international investment agreements and industrialization; concrete proposals for a local rural support network and rights-based climate finance. Also on the agenda were the draft criteria and corresponding operational sub-criteria for the right to development.

2. The Working Group recommended that the High Commissioner for Human Rights take measures to ensure a balanced and visible allocation of resources and to identify and undertake tangible projects for implementing the right to development and asked her to present in her next annual report an analysis of the implementation of that right.

3. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 39/9, endorsed those recommendations and decided that the Working Group should commence discussions to elaborate a draft legally binding instrument on the right to development through a collaborative process of engagement, including on the content and scope of the future instrument.

4. Thus, the Working Group was effectively moving into a new phase. Negotiating a legally binding instrument on the right to development was a formidable task and he would do his utmost to contribute to that endeavour. The consensus represented by the Sustainable Development Goals should help resolve the differing views around the right to development.

5. **Mr. Suárez Moreno** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the set of standards presented by the Chair-Rapporteur would be a very useful basis for future deliberations on the implementation and realization of the right to development. As the central subject of the development process, human beings should be the main beneficiary of that human right. However, far-reaching changes in the international economic structure would be necessary in order to guarantee its full realization and enjoyment, including the creation of economic and social conditions favourable to the developing countries.

6. At the Mid-Term Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in April 2018, the Ministers reiterated their commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular the right to development, and stressed the universal, inalienable and indivisible character of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. They reaffirmed their objective of turning the right to development into reality for all, as established in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Declaration on the Right to Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the same time, due account must be taken of the negative repercussions that unilateral coercive economic and financial measures were having on the realization of that right.

7. Efforts to place the right to development at the centre of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be pursued and the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies and above all the international human rights mechanisms and financial and commercial institutions must incorporate the right to development in their policies and seek to improve its acceptance and realization nationally and internationally.

8. The member States of the Movement also wished to reiterate their proposal for the organization of a high-

level international conference under the auspices of the United Nations on the right to development and to renew their call for the elaboration of a convention on the right to development.

9. **Ms. Chekrizova** (Russian Federation) said that development was the driver of the concept of human rights and the basis for addressing poverty, stimulating economic growth, bolstering social stability and security and thus developing society. It was intrinsically linked to the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups, such as children, women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The State had the primary responsibility to ensure the conditions for the effective enjoyment of the right to development.

10. Her delegation welcomed the efforts of the Chair-Rapporteur to seek out mutually acceptable solutions for all parties. However, it seemed premature to be discussing standards, as the existing standards and relative indicators were sufficient at the current stage. She doubted that their legally binding nature would facilitate a broader and more effective implementation under real-time conditions. Developing general approaches for the international community in implementing that category of rights seemed to be more important.

11. **Ms. Fernández** (Cuba) said that her Government opposed any attempt to reinterpret the right to development or to arbitrarily limit responsibility of States for its implementation to the national level. That right must be enforced by incorporating it into the policies and activities of international organizations and institutions. At their fourteenth Summit, held in Havana in September 2006, the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement had urged the United Nations human rights machinery to ensure the operationalization of the right to development as a priority, including through the elaboration of a convention on the right to development. The international community must not allow more time to pass without fulfilling that mandate. It should consider ways of moving forward without prejudice to the provisions of the Declaration on the Right to Development. Her delegation was concerned lest the content of the right to development might be weakened in the effort to reach a consensus.

12. **Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that a clear nexus existed between the realization of the right to development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals would facilitate the realization of the right to development, as contained in the 1986 Declaration. The proposed set of standards was a positive step in that direction. The holding of a high-level conference on the right to development would be an opportunity to draft a convention on that right.

13. As a country targeted by illegal unilateral sanctions for far too many years, Iran remained deeply concerned about the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on a whole range of human rights for civilians, in particular the right to development. More vulnerable segments of the society in particular the poor, persons with disabilities, children and older persons were bearing the brunt of those inhumane measures. The collective and indiscriminate punishment of civilians inherent in the imposition of unilateral sanctions was a crime against humanity. Depriving a whole population of its basic human rights, in particular the right to development, was reprehensible and should be condemned regardless of the pretext.

14. **Mr. Lu** Yuhui (China) said that his country supported the elaboration by the Working Group of an international legal instrument on the right to development. For developing countries, survival and development were the primary human rights. China supported global efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve common development and realize the right to development.

15. His delegation urged Member States to abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to respect the social systems and development paths chosen independently by countries with a view to ensuring peaceful and steady development. They should seek to establish a more equitable and reasonable international political and economic order that would guarantee the equal participation of all countries and the fair sharing of development outcomes. The North-South imbalance in development should be addressed; developed countries, in honouring their commitments to assist developing countries, should give priority to eradicating hunger and poverty. The United Nations human rights agencies should continue to prioritize the realization of the right to development.

16. China was committed to the principle of the inviolability of human development. It had been working to achieve its peoples' well-being and to ensure their ownership of the country. China had also been assisting developing countries in reducing poverty, improving livelihoods and safeguarding the right to life. It stood ready to create conditions and opportunities for all countries, especially developing countries, and to advance the cause of human rights.

17. **Mr. Ali** (Pakistan) said that the right to development was not about charity but rather about enablement and empowerment. The task at hand was to establish the parameters and practical components of that right so that it could be effectively pursued within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The work of the Chair-Rapporteur was extremely important and should receive the support and understanding of all Member States. South-South cooperation was a vital element of the international cooperation architecture for sustainable development and for the realization of the right to development.

18. Those objectives could not be achieved without fully understanding and alleviating the negative impact of armed conflict, foreign occupation and unilateral economic and financial coercive measures. He asked whether the Chair-Rapporteur had examined that issue, especially in terms of possible interlinkages with the work he had undertaken.

19. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her delegation considered that steady progress towards the realization of the right to development required effective development policies at the national level as well as a favourable economic environment and strong partnerships at the international level.

20. She asked for an explanation of the political impasse existing within the Working Group and what steps could be taken to overcome it, in particular how Member States could be encouraged to engage effectively and efficiently in its deliberations in order to fulfil the tasks entrusted to it by the Human Rights Council.

21. **Mr. Akram** (Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development) said that the impasse in the Working Group stemmed from the fact that Member States lacked the necessary political will to overcome their differences. In his view, the simplest approach would be to focus on those human rights instruments that had already been adopted by consensus, which ranged from the Charter of the United Nations to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The objectives of those instruments already showed a considerable degree of overlap and consistency in terms of specific areas relating to the right to development.

22. The basic standards that he had put forward could be pursued to set the groundwork for a much broader consensus in the future. He urged Member States to show the necessary political will and to act in a spirit of compromise. As the Chair-Rapporteur, he was bound by the decisions of the Member States that made up the Working Group. His task would be to try as much as possible to facilitate the emergence of a consensus.

23. **Mr. Alfarargi** (Special Rapporteur on the right to development) said that, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 36/9, he had begun to convene a series of regional consultations to identify good practices in designing, implementing, monitoring and assessing development policies and programmes that would be sustainable, inclusive and conducive to the realization of all human rights. He had also been working on methodology for conducting country visits to assess the implementation of the right to development. Seven countries had already responded positively to his requests, and his first visit, to Cabo Verde, was forthcoming.

24. Ever-increasing global challenges and crises posed a threat to the economic, social, cultural and political development of existing and future generations. International cooperation was recognized as a State obligation in various international legal and policy documents. South-South cooperation, for its part, had gained new momentum, becoming a vital element of the international cooperation architecture for sustainable development. It was an important complement to, rather than a substitute for, North-South cooperation. However, policymakers and stakeholders faced challenges such as unequal power relationships and benefit sharing and difficulties in mitigating adverse human rights impacts.

25. Nevertheless, South-South cooperation held much promise for the future and, as explained in his thematic report, its positive impact could be enhanced if a right-to-development perspective were incorporated into the process. The same applied to triangular cooperation. South-South cooperation programmes, policies and projects should promote a holistic understanding of development, in accordance with the right to development; they should empower rights-holders while assisting duty-bearers in meeting their obligations. Any discrimination or inequalities that impeded the realization of the right to development should be identified and addressed. The development outcomes of such cooperation as well as the processes themselves must be monitored and assessed in the light of human rights instruments and standards.

26. South-South cooperation could make important contributions through new multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development, sharing and replication of good practices and the mobilization of additional resource channels for financing sustainable development.

27. **Ms. Alfeine** (Comoros), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the African Group had welcomed the first regional consultation on the

realization of the right to development for the African region, which had taken place in March 2018 in Addis Ababa in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 36/9.

28. The fundamental tenets of the right to development were to be found in all the human rights instrumen' , including the Charter of the United Nations itself. That right was indivisible, independent and interrelated with all other human rights and was integral for the progress and prosperity of peoples around the world. It was unfortunate that the wider human rights debate often overlooked the pivotal role development could play in the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms.

29. The global landscape was plagued by a wide array of seemingly intractable problems: poverty, rising inequality, the prevalence of economic and financial crises, large movements of refugees and migrants, climate change and environmental degradation, as well as unprecedented political crises and conflicts. Those problems denied people their fundamental right to development and could only be solved through collective and political solutions and with the cooperation of all States.

30. As gaps in wealth and technology widened, as famines, drought and natural and man-made disasters persisted and as terrorism afflicted many parts of the world, often as a direct result of social and economic marginalization, it was imperative that the international community worked together to create a more just and equitable world order. Such an order should allow for the fruits of globalization and development to be enjoyed by all. A shift in the collective will and global mindset was necessary to promote realization of the right to development.

31. **Ms. Savitri** (Indonesia) said that, as one of the staunch supporters of South-South cooperation with an active role and a longstanding contribution to that collaboration platform, Indonesia firmly believed that South-South cooperation had a pivotal role to play in ensuring the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in realizing the right to development for all. However, despite its potential, which embodied important principles such as equality, inclusiveness, participation and national ownership, gaps persisted and there was an urgent need to integrate the perspective of the right to development into policies, programmes and other initiatives.

32. She sought the opinion of the Special Rapporteur on the most effective way of guaranteeing a holistic understanding of development and of translating it into real actions, bearing in mind that the concept transcended mere economic growth to embrace economic, social, cultural and political processes. How could it be ensured that expanding South-South cooperation would lead to revitalized partnerships and the full realization of the right to development? Lastly, she asked for further elaboration on the human rights impact assessment and the most effective way to integrate it into South-South cooperation initiatives.

33. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that the driving force for the 2030 Agenda should be the aspiration, expressed in the Declaration on the Right to Development, to participation by every individual in the political, economic, cultural and social gains to be derived from development. Her delegation was conscious of the complexity and sensitivity of the discussions on the right to development and appreciated the Special Rapporteur's identification of the many challenges faced. She asked if the regional consultations were aimed at creating guidelines for the realization of that right and urged him to continue those consultations. Those efforts would surely guarantee harmonization of all activities and would avoid double standards.

34. **Mr. Forax** (Observer for the European Union) said that his delegation wished to reiterate its support for the right to development, based on the indivisibility, interdependence and universality of all human rights, the multidimensional nature of development strategies and the individual as a central subject of the development process. The right to development required the full realization of civil and political rights, together with economic, social and cultural rights, and a mix of policies, creating an enabling environment for individuals, involving a wide range of actors at different levels. A rights-based approach to development, encompassing all human rights, including the right to development, was essential. The primary responsibility for ensuring the right to development lay with the State.

35. The European Union remained strongly committed to achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda. For too long, development had been considered in isolation from human rights. The 2030 Agenda was the turning point — all human rights must be integrated with sustainable development strategies and their impact on the rights of individuals must be taken into account. With respect to South-South cooperation, it would be interesting to hear more on the possible actions that could be taken to enhance the capacity of women.

36. His delegation wished to restate that it was not in favour of the elaboration of a legally binding international instrument as it did not believe that such an instrument was the appropriate mechanism for

realizing the right to development. However, it remained ready to engage constructively in the forthcoming negotiations and to pursue a consensus.

37. **Ms. Diedricks** (South Africa) said that her Government would like to reiterate its commitment to the elaboration of a comprehensive legally binding instrument in the form of a convention containing a set of norms and standards, as required in international human rights law, for the effective realization and practical enjoyment of the right to development as a human right. The recommendation relating to the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders was of particular interest. Referring to the suggestion that States should create or designate national bodies or agencies dedicated to South-South cooperation, she requested further views on how such national mechanisms or bodies were envisaged and what role they would play.

38. **Ms. Mukhtar Ahmed** (Sudan) said that her delegation was among those that were increasingly conscious of the unprecedented crises that the world was facing, ranging from severe environmental degradation, widespread poverty and migration to food shortages and dwindling water resources. Performance in terms of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals had been lower than expected. Likewise, the international community faced serious challenges in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and suffering was widespread among many populations across the world. The right to development remained an elusive goal. She hoped that the Special Rapporteur's efforts would help to place the right to development at the top of the global agenda.

39. She would welcome further insight into best practices or measures to expedite implementation of the development process, bearing in mind the widening wealth and technological gaps and escalation of man-made crises such as famine, drought and terrorism, with a view to ensuring that all could benefit from the fruits of globalization and development and to limit efforts to undermine South-South cooperation.

40. **Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that for many years developing countries that were in a position to do so had provided financial assistance, capacity-building, skills and personnel exchange and technology transfer to other members of the South. That agenda had to be set by countries of the South and should be guided by the well-known principles that had led to South-South cooperation.

41. Following the untenable withdrawal by the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran in defiance of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), the United States authorities, on a regular basis, had been threatening Iranians with the strongest sanctions in history. The illegal and inhumane unilateral sanctions imposed and intensified by the United States against Iranians had severely affected the well-being of ordinary citizens, in particular the most vulnerable, including women, children, older persons and those in need of medical attention. The sanctions victimized civilians and targeted their access to basic health care services, medicine, food and education. It amounted to the collective punishment of civilians in defiance of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. The imposition of unilateral coercive measures continued to violate the human rights, in particular the right to development, of a whole nation. As those sanctions were being applied extraterritorially and the United States unlawfully asserted jurisdiction beyond its national borders, they also targeted human rights, including the right to development, of third parties. The relevant United Nations human rights rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, might be expected to stand up for the principles of international law and express themselves on those genocidal, mass violations of human rights of Iranians. The United Nations and its human rights mechanisms had a clear responsibility to confront and condemn such threats, which violated and endangered all of the basic human rights of all Iranians. Their prolonged silence was incomprehensible.

42. **Mr. Araújo Prado** (Brazil) said that it was fundamental to highlight the importance of South-South cooperation in the broader human rights agenda. Mutual benefits should also be promoted through horizontal relationships. He asked which best practices in the area of South-South cooperation could be replicated in order to promote the right to development and the 2030 Agenda.

43. **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba) said that the Special Rapporteur, in accordance with his mandate, should provide technical assistance to States, international financial and economic institutions, and to the business sector and civil society with a view to the full realization of the right to development. The inequitable, antidemocratic international order that prevailed, coupled with egoism and the concentration of wealth, seriously undermined enjoyment of that right. Furthermore, wars, aggressions, threats to peace and unilateral coercive measures, such as the embargo imposed against Cuba by the United States of America, severely impacted all spheres of the country and were a flagrant violation of all the human rights of his people, including the right to development. Notwithstanding the

impact of that criminal policy, Cuba had recorded significant achievements in guaranteeing the rights of its population as well as that of other countries through major development cooperation programmes.

44. **Mr. Moussa** (Egypt) said that central to the endeavour to realize the right to development was the need to create a conducive, enabling international order that would allow for a more equitable distribution of the gains of globalization with the ultimate goal of comprehensive and sustainable development for all. He looked forward to the conclusion of the consultation process and the formulation of general guidelines for implementation of policies and programmes to promote the realization of the right to development. The wider human rights debates too often overlooked the pivotal role that development could play in the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms.

45. Currently, the right to development was more pertinent than ever as wealth and technology gaps widened and famine, drought and natural and man-made disasters persisted. Exercising that right was crucial to the creation of a more just and equitable democratic world order. Given that South-South cooperation was a complement to and not a substitute for North-South cooperation, he asked how the international community could be sure that those cooperation relationships could be maintained while pursuing the right to development.

46. **Mr. Alfarargi** (Special Rapporteur on the right to development) said that the purpose of the regional discussions was to allow him to assess the situation first hand and work out, with all regional stakeholders, best practices for exercising the right to development. The results had been quite encouraging. Once the last group consultation had been completed, he envisaged the possibility of a global meeting attended by all five regional groupings of the United Nations system.

47. In response to the problem raised by the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said that he did not underestimate or wish to shy away from it. Those sanctions were indeed a violation of human rights and a denial of the right to development. However, Special Rapporteurs did not have the power or authority to solve that problem; they could do no more than attempt some sort of persuasion.

48. With respect to the other issues raised, he would attempt to give written answers. He would also welcome proposals of the kinds of issues Member States wished him to research and discuss.

49. **Mr. Sewanyana** (Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order), presenting his report (A/73/158), said that the focus of his work would be less on the theoretical construct but more on the practice of democracy at the national level. He wished to engage States and relevant stakeholders on current obstacles to free, fair and inclusive elections, and, where appropriate, to identify best practices. The right to take part in the conduct of public affairs was essential to the realization of an international order that was democratic and equitable. That right applied not only to local affairs but also to global intergovernmental institutions. He would also examine how the right to participate in public affairs could be better realized in multilateral forums, with due attention to gender equality and civil society and, more importantly, how to make such institutions more responsive and inclusive.

50. Mindful of the adverse effects of corruption on the realization of a democratic and equitable international order and appreciative of the substantial work carried out in that area, he wished to engage States and other stakeholders on good practices that demonstrated effective private-public partnership, the enforcement of labour rights and environmental protection, and the commitment of businesses to non-discrimination and other rights-respecting practices.

51. Under the principle of open government, countries pledged to protect civil society organizations as a means of becoming more transparent, accountable and responsive to their own citizens. Recognizing the dangers faced by anti-corruption campaigners and other human rights defenders, he would also seek to analyse the connection between repression of civic activity and increased inequity.

52. Global governance forums unrelated to the United Nations, such as the Group of Seven, the Group of 20 and the World Economic Forum, played a part in developing the framework of the international order. It would be worthwhile to study their constitutions and practices, applying the principles of transparency, participation and accountability, with a view to strengthening their contribution to democratic governance and human rights.

53. International responses to global economic challenges, ranging from austerity measures to classical approaches to international investment, had proven insufficient to stem the causes and consequences of those phenomena. He intended to look at how the international community could better respond to those challenges in a way that would promote a more democratic and equitable world order.

54. Lastly, he wished to consider the nexus between youth, fragility, violence and opportunity. Young people were especially vulnerable in uncertain environments.

Limited access to resources, education, training, employment and a lack of economic opportunities constrained their prospects, leading them in some cases to resort to violence. They were also severely underrepresented in national, international and multilateral settings.

55. A new world order was possible, one that was based on universal respect for human rights, social justice, rule of law and equitable development. His mandate called for a holistic approach in an environment that would give due recognition to issues of participation, inclusion and transparency.

56. **Mr. Suárez Moreno** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, said that the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world and a just and equitable world order, on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, had always been at the centre of the priorities of the Non-Aligned Movement. The member States of the Movement wished to reiterate their deep concern at the growing tendency to resort to unilateralism and unilaterally imposed measures, which undermined the Charter of the United Nations and international law; furthermore they reiterated their commitment to the promotion, preservation and strengthening of multilateralism, involved in the decision-making process through the United Nations, by strictly adhering to the Charter and international law, with a view to establishing a just and equitable world order and global democratic governance. Democracy was a universal value based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural system and to participate fully in all aspects of their life.

57. **Mr. Castillo Santana** (Cuba) said that the Independent Expert should study international conditions and relations within the international community that facilitated or were an obstacle to the realization of a democratic and equitable international order. At the current session, Cuba would be presenting the draft resolution on that topic and hoped that it would receive strong support.

58. He asked the Independent Expert how he viewed the United States withdrawal from international agreements such as the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, its refusal to take part in negotiations on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and its failure to accept language and documents agreed by consensus. Could such an attitude be considered as contributing to the promotion of a truly democratic and equitable order?

59. **Mr. Sewanyana** (Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable world order) said that the right to development and the rule of law were issues that had no boundaries; they affected everyone. He was consulting widely with various stakeholders to establish the exact nature of the numerous barriers to the realization of a democratic and equitable international order. The current impasse stemmed from a series of problems: issues of solidarity, the imposition of unilateral coercive measures and the whole concept of State sovereignty. Many of those issues were cited by States when it suited them and discarded when it did not.

60. Strong partnerships were needed between the North and the South, together with a commitment between States, to ensure that those global values, respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law would be realized. The Charter of the United Nations provided a very good basis for the realization of peace, security and democracy across the world. He was eager to cooperate with as many stakeholders as possible and looked forward to the support of Member States. He therefore welcomed the opportunity to interface with the Third Committee in realizing his mandate.

61. **Ms. Gebrekidan** (Eritrea) said that politicized and selective forms of addressing human rights contributed to confrontation and derailment rather than to the promotion of rights. Her country strongly encouraged Member States and United Nations bodies to cooperate and engage positively in order to identify the root causes of the human rights challenges faced by different countries. Those countries that had shown a genuine interest in promoting human rights everywhere, including in Eritrea, were to be commended for their support. Her Government attached a great deal of importance to the universal periodic review, which was an effective mechanism for addressing human rights. Since the establishment of that mechanism, Eritrea had participated actively and was working assiduously to implement the 92 recommendations. It was ready to proceed to the third reporting cycle.

62. Her delegation recognized that peace and security, development and human rights were mutually reinforcing and was committed to the implementation of the comprehensive development agenda. The encouraging developments in peace and joint regional economic, political and security agreements in the Horn of Africa would certainly contribute to progress towards peace, economic development and the respect for the human rights of people in the region.

63. **Mr. Tōnē** (Tonga) said that his country was pleased to be part of a global endeavour to promote and

protect the rights of all. His Government recognized the integral value of the principle of equal access to justice and commended the United Nations agencies that continued to work to strengthen respect for human rights within the justice system through capacity-building initiatives, such as the organization of seminars and the publication of studies on pressing issues.

64. The human rights of the people of Tonga were inextricably linked to the integrity of its terrestrial and marine environment, particularly in the face of climate change and sea-level rise. He therefore welcomed the Special Rapporteur's reference to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

65. His delegation remained gravely concerned about the scourge of drug abuse, which was plaguing societies worldwide. Addressing that problem was critical for the promotion and protection of human rights of all. The drug epidemic, although a criminal concern, was also a public health issue and international cooperation in combating it was vital.

66. As a small island developing State, Tonga valued the universal periodic review process, which had proved useful as a mechanism for reporting comprehensively and collectively on human rights obligations. Tonga was making steady progress in addressing various human rights obligations and commitments towards its people. His Government appreciated the ongoing support it received from its international and regional development partners and recognized that protecting the rights of its nationals was an obligation of the State.

67. **Mr. Margaryan** (Armenia) said that in April and May 2018, following a peaceful revolution led by the people, a new Government had come to power in Armenia, ushering in major changes in the country's political system and daily life. The revolution was a momentous time in the history of Armenia during which the citizens, with the youth and women at the forefront, fully exercised their fundamental freedoms of expression, belief and opinion as well as their freedom of peaceful assembly. The revolution galvanized citizens to participate in civic life and had since given them a sense of confidence that they could participate meaningfully and democratically in public affairs and political life. Currently, Armenia was preparing for parliamentary elections, which represented another step towards consolidation of genuine democratic transformation.

68. Armenia was determined to embark on a new generation of reforms, which would result in enhanced political pluralism, equal opportunities and the eradication of corruption. The political transformation brought about by the democratic developments in Armenia was expected to continue to increase direct participatory democracy, civic engagement and participation at various levels of government. A number of executive and legislative reforms had been initiated, including measures to promote women's participation.

69. In September 2015, the General Assembly, at the initiative of Armenia, had unanimously adopted a resolution proclaiming 9 December as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. Her delegation would use the platform of that day to raise awareness of the goals of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and support its universalization.

70. **Ms. Pobee** (Ghana) said that the treaty body system had an immense potential to strengthen the protection of human rights and was a tool for advancing the rights of the most vulnerable in society including women, children and persons with disabilities. As such, it was indispensable for achieving inclusiveness and non-discrimination in the fulfilment of the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

71. The backlog of reports on implementation by States parties or non-compliance with reporting obligations must be urgently addressed. She was pleased to note, however, that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had taken measures to address some of the challenges confronting States Parties, including knowledge gaps, inadequate resources and lack of capacity of States to prepare their national reports.

72. Critical in those efforts was the improvement of the administration of justice at the national level. The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice of Ghana, established under the 1992 Constitution, had the mandate to protect universal human rights and freedoms, including civil, political, economic and social rights. The Commission promoted respect for human rights through public education and awareness creation, research and monitoring. It investigated complaints of violations of fundamental human rights.

73. The Justice for All Programme was introduced in 2007 to decongest the country's prisons and promote the rights of prisoners, especially those in remand. Special in-prison courts had been established to review cases in order to avoid overcrowding of inmates awaiting trial. The programme had been beneficial to the poor who could not afford legal fees. A number of other laws had been enacted to ensure universal coverage in education, health and social protection for all Ghanaians, irrespective of their social circumstances. Equal

attention must be devoted to all components of the comprehensive body of human rights instruments particularly in meeting the minimum standards in the sphere of economic and social rights.

74. International cooperation was needed to assist Member States in adhering to their commitments to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and to ensure that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the provisions guaranteed therein were available to all persons without exception.

75. **Mr. Salarzai** (Afghanistan) said that, despite massive security challenges, the current reform agenda of his country was progressing at a rapid pace, with the promotion and protection of human rights as its core principle. The Afghanistan Peace and Development Framework had ushered in institutional reforms across sectors. Poverty alleviation, increased employment opportunities, improvement in health and educational indicators as well as adherence to the rule of law and combating corruption were key priorities for the Government, which supported efforts to uphold human rights for all Afghans.

76. The independent Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan had assumed a key role in monitoring, promoting and protecting human rights at all levels. Currently, Afghans enjoyed freedom of expression. Thanks to the Government's diligent efforts, the media had become among the most open and vibrant in the region.

77. However, despite significant gains, the prolonged war imposed against the Afghan people had deprived them of their basic right to life. Violence had robbed thousands of young Afghans of their innocence; many had fallen victim to the ongoing bloodshed, lost limbs in landmines, been recruited as child soldiers or, in some cases, lured into carrying out heinous suicide attacks. In application of various international instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict, the Government had adopted strong measures to safeguard the rights of children, including criminalization of the sexual abuse of children, regulation of juvenile rehabilitation centres and expansion of child protection units in the Afghan police recruitment centres.

78. In 2018, Afghanistan had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. His country had been elected to the Human Rights Council (2018–2020). However, while his country advocated for a more peaceful world where human rights for all would be respected, terrorists and violent extremists had continued to attack his people, undermining their political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. For that reason, his Government had initiated a resolution on establishing an international day to remember and pay tribute to the victims of terrorism. Through that resolution, his delegation was garnering international support to enable victims to resume the exercise of their inalienable rights.

79. **Mr. Dzinadza** (Togo) said that his delegation wished to echo the concerns relating to the danger of politicizing the issue of human rights and to urge consensus and dialogue with a view to the greater protection and effective enjoyment of those rights. Appropriate mechanisms were needed to prevent threats to human rights, in particular in countries engaged in democratic processes.

80. The re-election of his country to the Human Rights Council was an opportunity for the Government to continue to consolidate democracy and the rule of law at the national level and to establish universal human rights and values. Economic and social rights would be upheld through programmes such as the National Development Programme, adopted in 2018 in accordance with the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

81. Since 2016, Togo had enacted a number of laws that incorporated the human rights conventions and treaties into its national legislation. The new penal code listed various recent types of offences and declared the crime of torture to be imprescriptible. The new Organic Law on the National Human Rights Committee, promulgated on 20 July 2018, complied with the Paris Principles and served as the national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

82. His delegation reiterated its willingness to work jointly with the other Member States, agencies and committed stakeholders to ensure that the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights were a reality throughout the world.

83. **Monsignor Grysa** (Observer for the Holy See) said that human rights and human dignity could never be allowed to become empty words uttered simply to assuage the collective conscience of members of the international community. The centrality of the human person in every aspect of the work of the Committee must be reaffirmed. Human rights always implied responsibilities, which were fulfilled through concrete commitment and actions, not just through ideas or words. Society must not only recognize the human rights of its people but also be resolute in meeting their basic needs and promoting their integral human development. Modern forms of ideological colonization

by the stronger and the wealthier to the detriment of the poorer and the most vulnerable were a cause for concern.

84. The Holy See remained concerned about the increasingly narrow interpretation of the right to life, both at the level of States and at the level of the treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms. That tendency was apparent within the current human rights discourse that refused to recognize the inherent value and dignity of human life at every stage. That ideological approach sought to create a hierarchy of human rights by relativizing human dignity, assigning more value and even rights to the strong and healthy while discarding the weak. Such an ideology led to enormous inequalities and injustices, often ignoring children in the womb and treating the lives of older persons, migrants or people with disabilities as expendable or even a burden to society. The international community must ensure that approach, which reduced a person's dignity or capacity for self-affirmation and focused on achieving a balance between competing rights, did not become the defining logic of human rights in the future. Instead, the principles of justice, solidarity and the common good should prevail, since they promoted the good of the entire human family and the dignity of every human person no matter how vulnerable.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.